

School nurses are uniquely positioned to play an important role in student mental health. Not only are student's medical conditions better managed, but mental health issues, some of which present as medical symptoms, can be identified.



▶ The challenge

School nursing is one of the broadest nursing roles, providing direct care, district planning, population management, medical screenings, and managing referrals. In many cases, school nurses serve multiple schools or an entire district.

Solution – Marinette School District

Shannon Jones, BSN-RN, NCSN, was the only registered nurse when she started work at Marinette School District and had to spread her time over the district's then six facilities. It really limited her having a consistent presence in each facility and building relationships. The School District understood the value school nurses have and added a second nurse. That helped, but still didn't provide the consistency of one nurse per building. Two things happened which were game changers for the district – they received a local grant to fund a third school nurse (which the district funded when the grant ended), and they consolidated facilities from six to four, providing primarily one school nurse per facility.

"When students are physically unwell, mental health symptoms become heightened and are more difficult for a child to self-manage," Jones said. "School nurses provide direct support and education on how to discern physical symptoms from behavioral health experiences so students can alleviate those symptoms in the real time of their experience."

Solution – Waupaca School District

Waupaca Schools has achieved platinum PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports) status across all three criteria (math, reading, behavioral supports). This signifies the district has an excellent intervention plan with tiered supports including mental health support. And school nurses are part of the intervention team.

Waupaca Schools has two school nurses who are supported by designated health aids. This model lifts some of the more routine responsibilities off the shoulders of nurses, freeing them up to focus on higher needs.

"Mental health is so woven into everything we do as a school nurse," said Jamie Trzebiatowski, BSN, RN, NCSN, Waupaca Schools. "Our patient's social emotional condition changes as we care for them."

Trzebiatowski would like to see greater understanding of what school nurses do. Those duties are vast and include:

- ▶ Complete assessments based on symptoms.
- ▶ Provide direct care, manage care, dispense medication, render first aid, and handle emergency medical needs.
- ▶ Conduct vision and hearing screenings.
- ▶ Speak with parents about their children's issues.
- ▶ Reporting.

"Nurses play a critical role in the well-being of our students. Simply put, we need more of them in our schools."

- Jamie Trzebiatowski, BSN, RN, NCSN, Waupaca Schools